



THE EDUCATOR

Newsletter of the Arlington Teachers' Association

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United We Stand, Divided We Fall

Many strong opinions about labor organizations have been thrown around in the press lately. You can't turn on the television or open the newspaper without hearing about some kind of union controversy, from the battle for collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin to the travails of the NFL players' association. As ATA members, we are all affected by these matters. It is my aim for this issue of *The Educator* to provide accurate information about not only what is at stake for union rights at the national level, but also what you, as an ATA member, can do to help in this difficult budget season. Most importantly, each and every ATA member needs to know that we can make a difference if we work together. The first step is just to care.

For the first five years of my teaching career I had only a vague notion of what it meant to be in a union. Teachers are in unions and I was a teacher; therefore, I was in a union. I knew that I had to pay dues and that there were certain officers whose job it was to do things like negotiate my contract. I didn't ask questions.

That changed this year. When I became the editor of *The Educator* I was still rather indifferent about union membership, but I started going to ATA meetings and witnessing first-hand what went on at them. That was when I realized that there was a lot more

to being in a union than paying dues and getting a new contract every few years. Concerns about electronic grading, PLC work, and standardized test scoring are just a few examples of things that the ATA has been working to get resolved for us. Until recently, I had no idea that the union would deal with matters like these, and in light of the recent media spotlight on teachers' unions I began to wonder

There is a lot more to being in a union than paying dues and getting a new contract every few years.

how many other ATA members were as unaware as I was. If we don't know what our own organization does for us, how can we be passionate about defending it from the attacks it has been suffering?

I decided to email a few random people from each school to see if my hypothesis was correct; I believed that the average Arlington teacher probably had little idea specifically what the ATA does for him or her. I asked two questions: "What does it mean to you to be a member of the ATA?" and "Do you benefit from union membership?" While this was definitely not a scientific study, a few things jumped out to me from the responses that I received. First of all, only 8 people of the 35

that I contacted wrote back. I know that teachers are very busy people, but I would like to think that we can generally take a minute to answer an email if we care to. That suggests to me that my average email recipient was either apathetic about the ATA or possibly disapproved of my prying. The second aspect was that the responses that I did receive were generally positive, but vague. Aside from statements about the big-picture benefits of unions, the most frequently cited specific item was contract negotiations. The more negative responses were insightful also. One mentioned that dues are high, but "probably justified." Another also questioned the collection of dues and was unhappy that "we do not get a choice whether they are being used to support causes we may not support individually." The use of member's money was a general theme.

I would like to thank everyone who did respond. It was nice to see that at least among my small sample group that the ATA is appreciated. At this time though, when not only is our organization being attacked, but our very livelihood belittled, we need to do more than appreciate. We need to unify and we need to act. I hope that the information in the following pages will inform you and maybe even clear up any misgivings that you might have about being in a labor union.

-Sam Falk, editor

Working Hard to Make a Difference

Trivia Challenge

Answer the question below correctly and you could win an ATA Polo shirt !

In what current district building was Arlington High School originally located?

Last month's winner, selected at random from among the three correct responses received, was **Renee Marvos** from UVMS. She correctly identified the **Triborough Amendment** as prohibiting a public employer from altering any provision of an expired labor agreement until a new agreement is reached. Renee is now the proud owner of an ATA polo shirt. Answer this month's question and you could win a polo shirt too!

Submit your answer to the above trivia question to rmchugh@acsdny.org by April 8th. The winner will be randomly selected from the correct submissions.

With all of the negative talk in the local and national media about teachers and unions in general, it is more important than ever to highlight the important and generous work we are taking part in within our community. The ATA has long been committed to working

hard to support important causes and organizations, and this year has been no different. This school year alone, our teachers have generously given over \$7,000 to amazing organizations, not to mention raising awareness about important causes and volunteering time to various events. Most re-

Thank You! It was so rewarding to see all the donations that came to the ATA Office for the Jackie Higgins Memorial SPCA Drive. Jackie would have been overwhelmed that this was being done in her name, but not surprised by your generosity. Shown in the picture are my wife, Jackie, and our daughter, Jacqueline, who is a veterinarian, and Jackie's dog, Boe. Your donations will go a long way to advance the safety and well being of animals. Thank you for your kindness. — Ron Higgins

cently, the ATA honored our friend, Jackie Higgins, with the 1st Annual SPCA Drive. We happily delivered two vanloads

of supplies and almost \$1000 to assist the SPCA with its important work. We will soon



Photo courtesy of Ron Higgins

launch our Thanksgiving in April drive to benefit three local food pantries and we will clean up a stretch of Route 55 during our Spring Trash Bash. In addition, be on the lookout for upcoming information about our

miniature golf outing to benefit the Arlington Education Foundation. This year's event will take place on Saturday, June 11, so mark your calendars now for this day of family fun.

The ATA PR Committee works hard to organize fundraisers and volunteer for various events throughout the year, but we can't do it without

the support of our great union of teachers. Please consider giving an hour or two of your time and/or coming out to one of our many events throughout the year. Now, more than ever,

we need to continue to be a positive force in the community and reach beyond the four walls of our classrooms to make a difference.

—Kristi Bogaczyk, PR Chair

Energy Specialist Strives to Save District Money

In an effort to both conserve energy and save money, the Arlington school district recently teamed up with Energy Education, Inc., a consulting firm, to hire an energy specialist. AHS science teacher Jacob Lawrence was selected for the position. Lawrence has been at the school for 10 years and teaches a class called "Arlington Going Green" which deals with energy conservation issues, so he was a natural fit for the job.

Lawrence is still a full-time teacher and receives a stipend for his work as an energy specialist. The funding for this comes from the cost reductions that the district will get from his efforts. He is very optimistic about the energy reductions being large enough to impact the district budget. "We are losing so many teachers due to

budget cuts this year, and this program has the potential to make a real difference on that front," he said. Energy Educa-



Photo by Sam Falk

District Energy Specialist and AHS science teacher Jacob Lawrence uses an infrared thermometer to test the temperature of a ceiling air intake with.

tion, Inc. has set a goal for the district to save \$6 million over the next 10 years.

According to Lawrence, his job right now is two-fold, "to learn as much as possible about

the program that Energy Ed is providing" and to conduct energy audits of the district's buildings. Most of his work takes place after school hours, touring unoccupied buildings to learn about "boilers, motors, exhaust fans, peak demand electricity and a host of other topics" along with gathering data about classroom temperatures and lighting.

Lawrence has some advice for how teachers can help conserve energy. At the end of the school day close shades and blinds to keep heat in the classroom, turn off the computer, monitor, and lights, and close the door. During the day consider teaching with the door closed, make sure lights in empty rooms are off, and report any heating issues to the head custodian. All of these small things done together can make a difference.

Budget Discussions Continue

Due to a severe decrease in state aid awarded to Arlington and increased costs, this year's school budget process has been a difficult one. When Superintendent Geoffrey Hicks began budget discussions with the community in January he informed it that even if the district could simply roll-over spending levels from last year's budget, a 15% tax increase would be necessary. This was clearly not acceptable to anyone.

Hicks began crafting his 2011–2012 budget proposal with a three-pronged approach to close the gap between income and spending; he recommended using over \$6 million of Arlington's fund balance, along with reductions in spending, and an increase to the tax levy.

The reductions Hicks proposed included a 5% cut in funds for teaching supplies, the elimination of all assistant coaches, Varsity B sports teams, two modified sports offerings, and 57.5 jobs.

The job cuts were spread widely across the schools in order to not totally eliminate entire programs. 29.5 teachers, 16 teaching assistants, and 8 support staff positions were included in the cuts.

Overall, the community lauded the

fact that the superintendent was able to keep the proposed tax levy under 4% with these cuts, but several of the reductions became topics of debate. Budget discussions held in February and March included both students and taxpayers voicing their opinions as to whether eliminating 6th grade computer classes and the high school social workers was a wise choice.

Recent developments indicate that Arlington will receive more money from the state and benefit from a decrease in projected health insurance costs. This increase in revenue may allow for the insertion of some of the eliminated items back into the budget. A final budget presentation will be made to the school board on April 12th. The statewide budget vote will take place on May 17th.

The next issue of *The Educator* will include more details about the final district budget that will be voted on by the community. It will also have information about what ATA members can do to help ensure its passage.

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Know Your NY State Legislation

Millionaire's Tax

In 2009 incomes of over \$500,000 received a tax rate increase from 6.85% to 8.97%. This increase is set to expire, but some lawmakers have proposed extending it for people making over \$1 million in an effort to restore funds cut from education. Governor Cuomo opposes this.

Tax Cap

Governor Cuomo has proposed limiting school budget tax levy increases to the lesser of either 2% or the rate of inflation, unless 60% of voters support a higher increase. This would severely limit districts' ability to raise funds.

Taylor Law

Defines public sector union bargaining rights in NY, such as establishing procedures for resolving contract disputes. It also prohibits unions from striking.

Triborough Amendment

Amendment to the Taylor Law that allows for all provisions of an expired labor agreement to stay in place until a new contract is negotiated. Without it, employers could alter an expired contract at will, although unions would be powerless to fight for new negotiations. Superintendent Hicks is among those who have called for this amendment to be modified.

Spotlight on the Contract: Evaluations

Each issue of *The Educator* will spotlight a particular part of our contract in an effort to make our members more familiar with their rights and the terms and conditions of their employment. If you have a section you would like to see featured, email rmchugh@acsdny.org.

"A written report shall be made of each classroom observation or evaluation that is to form a part of the teacher's personnel record. A copy of every such report shall be furnished to the teacher involved within eight (8) school days of such observation or evaluation and within eight (8) school days after the delivery of a copy of such report to the teacher, a conference shall be held between the evaluator and the teacher to discuss such report, unless such conference is mutually dispensed with. No such report shall be submitted to Central Administration, placed in the teacher's file or otherwise distributed or acted upon without such prior conference, unless both the evaluator and the teacher indicate in writing that such conference has been dispensed with."

Explanation: According to this provision of the ATA contract (Article XIV, page 19), there is a set amount of time that administrators have to follow up on any classroom observation they have made. If that procedure is not followed the teacher who has been observed should contact his or her senior building representative. You do not have to accept a late report. In addition, the observed teacher always has the right to discuss his or her evaluation with an administrator before signing it into his or her permanent record.

Labor Organizations Under Fire

Public employee unions, and the teaching profession, in particular, are being discussed and largely demeaned in the media. You know the truth about your profession, but do you know whether the statements being tossed around about unions are accurate? Here are some facts to employ in defense of our organization.

What they're saying: Eliminating collective bargaining by public employees, like what Ohio and Wisconsin are trying to do, will help alleviate states' financial woes.

The facts: A recent study done by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities found that **8 of the 13 non-collective bargaining states have budget shortfalls larger than either Wisconsin or Ohio.** In fact, one of those states, Nevada, has the largest percentage budget shortfall in the country.

What they're saying: Public workers in the U.S. are paid more than those in the private sector.

The facts: Public employees are twice as likely to have a college degree than private sector workers and average more years on the job. **State and local workers actually earn 4% less, on average, than private sector workers** with similar seniority and education, according to data from the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

What they're saying: Unions use compulsory dues to support political causes. They force workers to support Democrats.

The facts: **By law, not one cent of union dues can be used for any political purposes.** Your dues cannot even go toward supporting the school budget. Voluntary contributions to VOTE/COPE are the only money that the ATA can use to help get the school budget passed or lobby Albany in opposition to tax cap legislation. Money that NYSUT and the ATA receive in this way are used to support causes that benefit education, not strictly along any political party lines. On the other hand, private corporations are free to use as much money as they would like to advocate for any political agenda without the permission of their shareholders.

What they're saying: Increases in salaries and pensions for public employees are unfair.

The facts: Public sector pay, on average, has not significantly increased in recent years. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that **in the last 10 years total compensation for teachers grew at a slower rate (61.4%) than average private sector compensation (72.6%).**

What they're saying: Collective bargaining rights of unions are responsible for the high cost of public employee pensions.

The facts: Data in the *New York Times* (3/11/11) shows that **there is no correlation between the percentage of a retiree's previous income replaced by a pension and the percent of public workers per state covered by collective bargaining agreements.**



Robert McHugh (AHS) and Betsy Marshall (JDWR) met NYSUT president Dick Ianuzzi (left center) at a February 26 rally at the State Capitol in Albany. They were there to support the rights of public employees and their unions.

Photos by Sam Falk

What You Can Do to Help

Be Informed: Make sure that you stay aware of what is going on in the struggles for union rights and educational funding so that you can correctly inform others. Some suggested websites are shown below.

Contact Your Legislators: Fax, email, or write to let them know that you do not support anti-union legislation or cuts to education. If you did not receive a packet about this at the general membership meeting ask your senior building representative for one.

Give to VOTE/COPE: Contributions can be given to the PAC member at your building or sent to Steve Hertzog at the ATA office. This is the only money collected from you by the ATA that can be used to fight attacks on our organization, or support pro-education causes.

Go to Rallies: Attendance at local events, such as the “We Are One” rally in Newburgh on April 4th, are a great way to support fellow workers and to make our common cause visible to the public.

Where to Find More Information:

New York State United Teachers — www.nysut.org

American Federation of Teachers — www.aft.org

AFL-CIO — www.aflcio.org

We Are One — www.we-r-1.org

Center for Budget and Policy Priorities—www.cbpp.org

Center for Economic and Policy Research — www.cepr.net

THREATS ACROSS THE NATION

Legislation threatening the quality of education or the rights of labor organizations is currently active in at least 18 states. Read more at aft.org/difference.

Wisconsin

- Republican Gov. Scott Walker recently signed a bill that eliminates collective bargaining for most public employee unions, in addition to raising health care and pension costs. It is under dispute in court.

Florida

- Republican Gov. Rick Scott recently signed a bill that eliminates teacher tenure and enacts a merit-pay system. New teachers will have only one year contracts.

Idaho

- Republican Gov. C.L. Otter recently signed a bill restricting collective bargaining agreements to salaries and benefits for teachers, and phasing out the tenure system.

Ohio

- Republican Gov. John Kasich recently signed a bill that eliminates collective bargaining for workers in public colleges and allows for government officials to have to sole power to decide contract disputes.



Photo by Sarah Hicks



Photo by Siouzzanne Harris

We Are Wisconsin! ATA members at many schools, including UVMS (above left) and Traver Road (above right) wore red on February 25 to show solidarity with teachers in Wisconsin.

2010—2011 ATA Officers

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LMS — Patty Bauerlein

UVMS — Dave Lazarus

AHS — Steve Hertzog

AHS — Noreen Mills-Martin

CAO — Sue Lesser

What's Going On?

"What's Going on" is a monthly feature of The Educator. It highlights noteworthy accomplishments by ATA members. Do you know of a colleague who deserves recognition? Let The Educator know by emailing sfalk@acsdny.org. We can't know what's going on at all of your schools without your help!

Congratulations to the following ATA members for their contributions to the Arlington community and beyond.

Librarians **Mindy Gray (Traver)** and **Lorelei Hauptmann (West Road)** were presenters at the 9th annual New York Association for Computers and Technology in

Education (NYSCATE) conference held March 5 at Ketcham H.S. in Wappingers Falls.

On March 15, along with **Pauline Herr (LMS)**, they also presented "Curriculum Connections Through Literature" for the Mid-Hudson Reading Council. Grey, Hauptmann, and Herr have also taught children's literature classes for Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh.

The annual DCMEA All County Festival was held on February 25 and 26 at Beacon High School. It was chaired by **Meghan Dorsey (Noxon)**. Many Arlington music teachers were

on hand to keep things running smoothly for the guest conductors. Some auditioned students for solos, **Hollis Bakke** and **Kathleen Healy** ran sectionals for chorus, and **Christine Mangiamele** played conga and **Leanne Sowul** was on the flute to accompany the choral part of the concert.

Colleen Napora (AHS), **Theresa Gerlach (AHS)**, and **Laura DiStefano (AMS)** recently played in the "Hoops for Hope" charity basketball tournament at Marist. All of the funds raised go to help Hudson Valley residents with breast cancer.

AHS Culinary Program is Nationally Recognized

The culinary arts program at Arlington High School was recently selected as one of the "Hot 100" most influential culinary programs in the nation by the National Center for Hospitality Studies at Sullivan University. The selections are based on criteria such as excellence in curriculum and having a positive impact on the community. AHS was the only non-vocational school in New York to make the list.

While this is the first time that the program, under the direction of Chef Jeremy Losee, has won this distinction, Arlington also enters state and national contests and was even awarded first place in a national culinary arts competition in 2008.

The AHS culinary arts program includes classes in baking and pastry, chef prep, and cultural foods. Students are required to test their skills by providing food for district events such as the Charlie Johnson re-

ception, the AHS Pops concert, and the car show in the spring. They have also catered the ATA holiday party, to much acclaim.

Losee, a 1998 Arlington graduate, is quick to turn down



Photo by Sam Falk

AHS Culinary Arts teacher Jeremy Losee gives advice to student Olivia Larocca about a lunch that she is preparing for sale to school faculty as part of her Advanced Culinary Arts class.

any congratulations directed toward him. At the high school he has a reputation for working long hours and providing exemplary food for the staff, but for him it is all about the students. His motivation for being a culinary arts teacher is simply to "give my knowledge back to others." He sees his program as benefitting the school not only

by saving money that would be used to send students to BOCES, but in helping students who need to find a niche in life and something they excel at. According to Losee, "Many of the students I see, or take classes in our department are those students that are not the traditional academically strong students. In taking these classes, they find a possible career path, and they seem to do better in their other regular academic classes. They are pointed in a direction for the rest of their lives, which helps to prevent them from dropping out of school."

In addition to guiding students at the high school, Losee's program has also reached out to district elementary schools. This year they provided a cooking demonstration to help with a reading project at Vail Farm, and contributed cookies to a fundraiser at Traver Road. In the past they have also presented at Beekman Elementary's Career Day.

Unity Pub Raises Spirits

The third ATA Unity Pub of the year was held at Pizzeria Uno in Poughkeepsie on Friday, March 11th. Members enjoyed free appetizers and drink specials along with the company of colleagues from other schools whom they might not otherwise get to see. Sponsored by the LAP program, these events are meant to help boost morale and camaraderie, especially in the recent climate of negativity toward teachers.

The highlight of the event was an Arlington trivia competition run by Colleen Napora (AHS). Napora used questions contributed by district principals about their schools. Teams of three to six members competed and the winners were a group of physical education teachers.



Dates to Remember



APRIL

4th—"We Are One" Rally, 4:30 p.m., Rte 300 & 17K, Newburgh

9th—"We Are One" Rally, 12 p.m., 42nd St. & 7th Ave., NYC

12th—Board of Education Meeting, 7:30 p.m., AHS

Final School Budget Presentation

13th—Deadline for donations to the Thanksgiving in April food drive

15th—Team Hope Basketball Tournament, 7:00 p.m., AHS

18th-22nd—Spring Break

26th—ATA Executive Council Session, 4 p.m., AHS room 1432

Board of Education Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Beekman

30th—Trash Bash, 8:00 a.m., LMS



MAY

10th—Board of Education Meeting, 7:30 p.m., AHS

17th—**School Budget Vote**

ATA Executive Council Session, 4 p.m., AHS room 1432

24th—Board of Education Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Vail Farm

30th—Memorial Day, No school



Announcements

Help Wanted!

The Educator needs you. We are looking for all ATA members interested in writing or photography to contribute to the newsletter. We would also like representatives from all of the schools in the district to aid us in gathering information to print. Please contact Sam Falk at sfalk@acsdny.org if you are

Address and Name Updates Needed

If you have recently moved or changed your name, remember to update your information in AESOP along with contacting the ATA, the district, and NYSUT. Contact Jeanne Carlos at Central Office with any AESOP questions.

Check out the newly updated ATA webpage at www.arlingtonteachers.com for photos, contact information, benefits forms, issues of *The Educator* and more.